

Emotional Intelligence and Employee Commitment: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract

Orientation: Emotional intelligence (EI) has attracted sustained scholarly interest as a determinant of workplace attitudes and behaviours. Within the Nigerian manufacturing context, the relationship between EI and employee commitment remained insufficiently examined at both the conceptual and theoretical levels.

Research Purpose: This article reviewed the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature on EI and employee commitment, with the aim of synthesising existing knowledge and identifying gaps relevant to the Nigerian organisational context.

Motivation for the Study: Existing studies on EI and commitment have concentrated on healthcare, education, and banking sectors in Western and Asian settings. The African manufacturing sector, where high power distance and collectivist norms shape emotional expression, remained underexplored in the empirical literature.

Research Approach/Design and Method: A systematic theoretical review was conducted. Conceptual frameworks of EI were examined across the ability-based model (Mayer & Salovey, 1997), the Goleman competency model (1995, 1998), and the Bar-On model (1997). The Three-Component Model of Commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997) was applied as the dependent variable framework. Empirical studies were drawn from 20 peer-reviewed sources published between 2014 and 2023 across multiple national contexts.

Main Findings: The review established consistent positive associations between EI components - specifically emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and conflict management - and the three dimensions of employee commitment. The incremental predictive validity of EI over personality traits and the contextual specificity of its effects in

African organisational settings, however, warrant further empirical scrutiny.

Practical/Managerial Implications:

Organisations in Nigeria's manufacturing sector could benefit from embedding EI competency frameworks in recruitment, leadership development, and performance management systems. Targeted EI training programmes aligned with local cultural norms may strengthen affective and normative commitment among employees.

Contribution/Value-Add: This article provides a theoretically grounded synthesis of EI and commitment research, identifies gaps in the African manufacturing literature, and proposes a conceptual foundation for future quantitative and mixed-methods investigations in the Nigerian private sector.

Keywords: emotional intelligence; employee commitment; self-awareness; self-regulation; empathy; conflict management; organisational behaviour; Nigeria

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This article examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and employee commitment through a systematic review of conceptual definitions, theoretical frameworks, and empirical evidence. Four components of EI identified in the study's original research objectives - emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and conflict management - were reviewed in relation to the three dimensions of organisational commitment advanced by Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997). The review was conducted against the backdrop of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria, where the interplay between sociocultural factors and workplace emotional dynamics remained underexplored.

1.2 Current Theoretical Perspective

The study of EI in organisational settings has evolved through three dominant theoretical traditions. The ability model advanced by Mayer and Salovey (1997) treats EI as a set of cognitive abilities related to perceiving, facilitating, understanding, and managing emotions. The mixed-model proposed by Goleman (1995, 1998) reconceptualises EI as a set of trainable competencies encompassing self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Bar-On (1997) offers a third formulation grounded in non-cognitive capabilities and environmental adaptation. Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997) three-component model remains the most empirically validated framework for examining organisational commitment, distinguishing between affective, continuance, and normative forms of attachment.

These frameworks have generated a substantial body of research across healthcare (Roy, 2023; Prempeh, Gyamfi & Odonkor, 2023), education (Bayu, Susita & Parimita, 2023; Nnadi et al., 2022), and financial services (Rizki, Titisari & Prihatini, 2019). However, theoretical development of EI research within the African manufacturing context, where cultural variables such as high power distance and collectivism shape emotional norms (Lu et al., 2020), has remained limited. Stokes, Schneider and Lyons (2019) identified the need for locally grounded EI models on the African continent, a call that has not yet been sufficiently addressed in the literature.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Objectives

Despite the growing body of literature connecting EI to positive workplace outcomes, two substantive gaps persist. First, the majority of EI-commitment studies have been conducted in Western, Asian, or healthcare-specific settings. The manufacturing sector in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, has received minimal systematic theoretical attention in this literature. Second, prior reviews have tended to treat commitment as a unidimensional construct, thereby obscuring the differential relationships that distinct EI competencies may have with affective, continuance, and normative commitment.

This article addressed these gaps by pursuing the following objectives: (1) to review and synthesise the conceptual definitions and

principal models of EI; (2) to examine the nature and dimensions of employee commitment as theorised in the literature; (3) to evaluate the theoretical frameworks most relevant to understanding EI-commitment relationships; and (4) to synthesise the empirical evidence on EI and commitment and identify research gaps with particular relevance to the Nigerian organisational context.

1.4 Rationale and Value-Add of the Study

The value of this review lies in three contributions. It provides a theoretically integrated synthesis linking the ability-based model of EI directly to the three-component model of commitment, offering a more precise analytical scaffold than previous narrative reviews. It locates this synthesis within the African organisational context, identifying specific cultural and structural factors that may moderate EI-commitment relationships in Nigerian manufacturing firms. It also proposes directions for future empirical research that address identified conceptual and methodological gaps.

2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a theoretical research approach. Theoretical research involves the systematic examination and synthesis of existing conceptual frameworks, models, and empirical studies to develop new theoretical insights or clarify existing ones (Jaakkola, 2020). This approach was appropriate given the study's aim of integrating dispersed literatures on EI and employee commitment into a coherent theoretical account relevant to the Nigerian manufacturing context. No primary data were collected; the analysis was conducted entirely through engagement with published peer-reviewed sources.

2.2 Research Method

2.2.1 Targeted Body of Literature

The review targeted three distinct but interrelated bodies of literature: (1) conceptual and definitional literature on EI, including foundational texts by Salovey and Mayer (1990), Goleman (1995, 1998), and Bar-On (1997); (2) theoretical literature on organisational commitment, centring on the Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) three-component model and its empirical extensions; and (3) empirical studies examining the relationship between EI

or its components and employee commitment or related outcomes such as job satisfaction, turnover intention, and organisational performance. Priority was given to studies published between 2014 and 2023, though foundational works were retained where they provided theoretical scaffolding.

2.2.2 Data Gathering and Analysis

Literature was identified through searches of Google Scholar, Scopus, and EBSCOhost databases. Search terms included 'emotional intelligence', 'employee commitment', 'organisational commitment', 'self-awareness', 'self-regulation', 'empathy', 'conflict management', 'African workplace', and 'Nigeria'. The search was conducted between June and September 2024. Sources were required to be published in peer-reviewed journals or scholarly books, directly relevant to EI or organisational commitment, and available in English. Grey literature and non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded. The analysis proceeded in three stages: conceptual comparison across EI and commitment traditions; theoretical evaluation for explanatory power; and thematic synthesis of empirical evidence organised by outcome, sector, and region.

3. Results

3.1. Conceptual Review of Emotional Intelligence

3.1.1 Definitions and Conceptual Boundaries

Three definitional traditions anchor the EI literature. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined EI as the capacity to recognise and interpret emotions, to facilitate cognitive processes by harnessing emotional information, to comprehend emotions and emotional knowledge, and to manage emotions in ways that promote both emotional and intellectual growth. This ability-based definition treats EI as a genuine form of intelligence that can be assessed through performance tasks requiring emotional problem-solving (Mayer, Caruso & Salovey, 2016). Goleman (1995) advanced a broader conceptualisation, treating EI as five competencies - self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills - organised hierarchically. Bar-On (1997) proposed a third model organised into composites of self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal skills, decision-making, and stress

management. The current review adopts Goleman's model as its primary analytical framework because it maps directly onto the four EI components specified in the study's research objectives.

3.1.2 Emotional Self-Awareness

Emotional self-awareness is the ability to recognise and understand one's own emotional states and assess their impact on thought and behaviour (Goleman, 1995). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) identified the capacity to monitor emotions in real time and differentiate between closely related affective states as hallmarks of high emotional self-awareness. Joseph and Newman (2010) established a positive predictive relationship between emotional self-awareness and job performance in roles characterised by sustained interpersonal interaction.

3.1.3 Self-Regulation

Self-regulation refers to the capacity to manage impulses and emotional reactions in pursuit of goals and social norms (Goleman, 1995). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) identified composure under pressure, resilience during change, and rapid recovery from emotional distress as key indicators. The construct operates across physical, emotional, and cognitive domains (Geisler et al., 2019; Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Hofmann, Schmeichel & Baddeley, 2012). Batool (2013) associated self-regulated leadership with flexibility, accountability, and sustained job satisfaction.

3.1.4 Empathy

Empathy is the ability to sense, understand, and care about others' emotions and perspectives (Goleman, 1995; Riess, 2017). Decety and Jackson (2004) identified accurate recognition of nonverbal emotional cues as a primary empathic skill. Gerdes, Segal, Johnson and Mullins (2011) distinguished cognitive perspective-taking from emotional empathy and compassionate empathy. In organisational settings, leaders high in empathy lead teams reporting greater engagement, wellbeing, and perceived support (Scott, Leritz & Mumford, 2004). Teding van Berkhout and Malouff (2016) demonstrated through meta-analytic evidence that empathy is developable.

3.1.5 Conflict Management

Conflict management is the capacity to navigate interpersonal and organisational disagreement through communication, negotiation, mediation, and de-escalation (Rahim, 2002). Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2013) described effective conflict managers as individuals who listen actively, focus discussions on issues rather than personalities, and build consensus through participatory problem-solving. Schlaerth, Ensari and Christian (2013) established that EI underpins effective conflict management by supporting perspective-taking and emotion regulation under interpersonal tension.

3.2 Concept and Dimensions of Employee Commitment

3.2.1 Definitional Review

Employee commitment refers to the psychological and emotional bond between an employee and their organisation, manifesting as a willingness to remain with and actively contribute to organisational goals (Obiekwe, Mobolade & Akinade, 2021). At the behavioural level, committed employees exceed role expectations, maintain constructive attitudes, engage in citizenship behaviour, and demonstrate reduced turnover intentions (Grabowski et al., 2019).

3.2.2. Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment

Affective commitment is the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement an employee experiences in relation to their organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Employees with strong affective commitment remain because they want to, and contribute discretionary effort beyond contractual requirements. Continuance commitment reflects an employee's perception of the costs associated with leaving, including forfeited pension benefits, accumulated tenure, and reduced external employment prospects (Chowdhury & Chaudhuri, 2020). Normative commitment reflects a felt sense of obligation or moral duty to remain (Inam, Ho, Sheikh, Shafiqat & Najam, 2021). Meyer and colleagues (1993) found that normative commitment, like affective commitment, was negatively associated with intentions to leave, though this effect was moderated by levels of

continuance commitment in certain occupational groups.

3.3 Theoretical Frameworks

3.3.1. The Ability Model of Emotional Intelligence

The four-branch ability model of EI, introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1997) and refined by Mayer, Caruso and Salovey (1999, 2016), conceptualises EI as a set of hierarchically organised mental abilities: perceiving emotions, facilitating thought using emotions, understanding emotions, and managing emotions (Rivers, Brackett, Salovey & Mayer, 2007). The model's emphasis on performance-based measurement distinguishes it from mixed-model approaches and enables more rigorous incremental validity testing (Freeland, Terry & Rodgers, 2008).

3.3.2. The Three-Component Model of Commitment

Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997) three-component model conceptualises commitment as a psychological state characterising the employee-organisation relationship. The three components differ in psychological character: affective commitment is anchored in emotional investment; continuance commitment reflects rational cost-benefit appraisal; and normative commitment reflects internalised obligation. The model has received consistent empirical support across professional contexts (Irving, Coleman & Cooper, 1997; Snape & Redman, 2003).

3.4 Empirical Review

3.4.1. EI and Organisational Commitment: Direct Relationships

The empirical literature consistently reports positive associations between EI and employee commitment. Papoutsis, Drigas and Skianis (2019) and Sembiring, Nimran, Astuti and Utami (2020) established that employees with high EI demonstrated stronger organisational commitment. Alshaabani, Naz, Magda and Rudnak (2021) found that emotion monitoring and control was positively associated with affective commitment. Don-Baridam (2021) and Supramaniam and Singaravello (2021) showed that high emotional management ability predicted stronger normative commitment. Nnadi, Nnodum, Ify, Eberechukwu and Uzoekwe (2022) examined 69 school counsellors in Enugu State, Nigeria,

and found a significant positive relationship between EI and job commitment using Pearson's correlation and OLS estimation.

3.4.2. EI in the African Organisational Context

Evidence from the African continent demonstrated contextually relevant findings. Abeyi-Otor and Jato (2023) examined 160 secondary school teachers in Makurdi, Nigeria, and found that all four EI constructs significantly and positively predicted teacher performance. Prempeh, Gyamfi and Odonkor (2023) reported through qualitative interviews with nurse managers in Ghana that interpersonal emotional awareness improved professional responsiveness. Acheampong, Owusu-Manu, Kissi and Tetteh (2023) found that emotional management was significantly and positively related to project performance among PMI-Ghana project managers. Obiunu and Yalaju (2020) examined 400 Chevron Nigeria staff in Warri using regression analysis and found positive effects of EI, interpersonal communication, and job satisfaction on employee performance.

3.4.3. Dissenting and Cautionary Evidence

The literature includes important cautionary findings. The meta-analysis by O'Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, Hawver and Story (2011) concluded that EI has limited incremental effect on job performance beyond the variance explained by cognitive ability and conscientiousness. Locke (2005) argued that EI overlaps substantially with established personality traits and questioned its incremental validity as a predictor of occupational outcomes. These findings indicate that research designs must include controls for personality and cognitive ability, and use validated, context-appropriate commitment scales, if the incremental contribution of EI to commitment is to be isolated.

4. Discussion

4.1 Outline of Results

The review established four substantive findings. First, EI shows consistent positive associations with employee commitment across multiple national and sectoral contexts, supported by studies from Nigeria (Nnadi et al., 2022; Obiunu & Yalaju, 2020), Ghana (Acheampong et al., 2023), Kenya (Makokha,

Awino & Nyambegera, 2023), Indonesia (Bayu et al., 2023), Spain (Suarez-Albanchez et al., 2022), and India (D'Souza, Irudayasamy & Parayitam, 2023). Second, the four EI components correspond theoretically to distinct pathways through which EI may influence commitment dimensions. Emotional self-awareness and empathy are most directly linked to affective commitment by facilitating relational quality. Self-regulation is most relevant to continuance commitment by enabling stress management. Conflict management competence is most relevant to normative commitment by generating the sense of mutual obligation that underpins felt duty to remain. Third, the African and specifically Nigerian manufacturing context presents underexplored contextual variables including high power distance and collectivist cultural norms (Lu et al., 2020; Stokes, Schneider & Lyons, 2019). Fourth, the cautionary evidence of O'Boyle et al. (2011) and Locke (2005) signals that incremental predictive validity of EI requires continued methodological scrutiny.

4.2 Practical Implications

These findings carry three implications for human resource management in the Nigerian manufacturing sector. First, organisations should integrate EI competency assessment into recruitment and selection processes. Second, leadership development programmes should incorporate targeted EI training aligned with the specific cultural context of Nigerian workplaces. Goleman (1998) argued that EI competencies are trainable, and Teding van Berkhout and Malouff (2016) confirmed this through meta-analytic evidence. Third, performance management systems should be reviewed to ensure that EI-related behaviours, including peer support, constructive conflict resolution, and emotional responsiveness to subordinates, are included in formal assessment criteria.

4.3 Limitations and Recommendations

This review has three limitations. First, the absence of primary data means that the proposed relationships between specific EI components and commitment dimensions are inferred from the extant literature rather than tested directly. Future research should use validated multi-dimensional measures of both EI, such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT),

and commitment, such as Meyer and Allen's (1997) Organisational Commitment Scale, in a single study. Second, the search was limited to English-language sources, which may have excluded relevant studies from francophone and lusophone West Africa. Third, studies from heterogeneous organisational and cultural contexts were treated as broadly comparable, which may have introduced interpretive noise.

5. Conclusion

This review synthesised the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature on EI and employee commitment. The evidence across the reviewed literature supports a positive directional relationship between EI competencies and employee commitment, with the Ability Model of EI and the Three-Component Model of Commitment providing a theoretically rigorous framework. The review identified a substantive gap in the literature: no published empirical study has examined the EI-commitment relationship within Nigeria's manufacturing sector, where cultural variables including high power distance and collectivist norms may shape both the expression of emotional competence and the formation of organisational attachment. The practical recommendations offered - centring on culturally grounded EI training, EI-inclusive recruitment criteria, and recognition of emotionally competent leadership behaviours - are intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the management of human capital within Nigerian manufacturing enterprises.

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